

Notes on Today's Composers – 2/22/26

Amy Marcy Beach (1867-1944) once said, “The monuments of a nation mark the progress of its civilization, but its intelligence and education are qualified by its music.”

Born in Henniker, NH, Beach's musical genius showed at an early age, memorizing 40 songs by the age of one, singing in harmony at two, playing four-part hymns and composing at age four, and at age seven, playing Chopin, Beethoven, Handel and her own compositions in a public recital. After moving to Boston to study piano, she debuted with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at eighteen. Despite such an obvious display of talent she was forbidden to play further in public by her parents and her new husband who was twenty years her senior. She turned instead to composition, studying the works of master composers and translating Berlioz's treatise on orchestration. She became the first American woman to achieve widespread recognition as a composer of large-scale orchestral works. Her first success came with the performance of her Mass in E-flat by the Handel and Haydn Society (Boston), followed quickly by other commissions. Beach was a founding member and first president of the Society of American Women Composers.

After her mother's and husband's deaths, she sailed for Europe where she was celebrated both as a pianist and composer. Her success continued when she returned to the U.S., splitting her time between Cape Cod, New York City, and the McDowell artists' residency in NH. In 2000, her name was added to the Edward A. Hatch Memorial Shell on the Esplanade, making her the first and only female composer among the 88 recognized there.

Amy Marcy Beach (1867-1944) once said, “The monuments of a nation mark the progress of its civilization, but its intelligence and education are qualified by its music.”

Born in Henniker, NH, Beach's musical genius showed at an early age, memorizing 40 songs by the age of one, singing in harmony at two, playing four-part hymns and composing at age four, and at age seven, playing Chopin, Beethoven, Handel and her own compositions in a public recital. After moving to Boston to study piano, she debuted with the Boston Symphony Orchestra at eighteen. Despite such an obvious display of talent she was forbidden to play further in public by her parents and her new husband who was twenty years her senior. She turned instead to composition, studying the works of master composers and translating Berlioz's treatise on orchestration. She became the first American woman to achieve widespread recognition as a composer of large-scale orchestral works. Her first success came with the performance of her Mass in E-flat by the Handel and Haydn Society (Boston), followed quickly by other commissions. Beach was a founding member and first president of the Society of American Women Composers.

After her mother's and husband's deaths, she sailed for Europe where she was celebrated both as a pianist and composer. Her success continued when she returned to the U.S., splitting her time between Cape Cod, New York City, and the McDowell artists' residency in NH. In 2000, her name was added to the Edward A. Hatch Memorial Shell on the Esplanade, making her the first and only female composer among the 88 recognized there.

Florence B. Price (1887-1953) was the first African American woman to have her music performed by a major symphony orchestra. In 1933, Price won first prize in a competition and the music critic of the *Chicago Daily News* declared it “a faultless work, a work that speaks its own message with restraint and yet with passion... worthy of a place in the regular symphonic repertoire.”

Price grew up in Little Rock, AR and studied at the New England Conservatory (1903-06), graduating with honors and earning a double degree in organ and piano. She moved to Atlanta to teach piano at Clark Atlanta Univ. where she quickly became head of the music department.

In 1927, due to rising racial tensions, she moved with her husband and their family to Chicago where she continued studying and composing. After divorcing in 1931, Price accompanied silent films and composed radio jingles to support her two daughters. It was during this time that Price began to receive wider acclaim for her compositions for orchestra and piano.

After her death, Price’s works were mainly forgotten, until boxes of her compositions were found abandoned in the attic of her former home in Chicago. This led to her music being reevaluated and performed. Price is praised for blending African American musical traditions—such as spirituals and dance rhythms—with European symphonic forms, creating a uniquely American sound. Many new recordings have been made – look for the Catalyst Quartet’s “*Uncovered*” series to hear her gorgeous, harmonically rich music.

Florence B. Price (1887-1953) was the first African American woman to have her music performed by a major symphony orchestra. In 1933, Price won first prize in a competition and the music critic of the *Chicago Daily News* declared it “a faultless work, a work that speaks its own message with restraint and yet with passion... worthy of a place in the regular symphonic repertoire.”

Price grew up in Little Rock, AR and studied at the New England Conservatory (1903-06), graduating with honors and earning a double degree in organ and piano. She moved to Atlanta to teach piano at Clark Atlanta Univ. where she quickly became head of the music department.

In 1927, due to rising racial tensions, she moved with her husband and their family to Chicago where she continued studying and composing. After divorcing in 1931, Price accompanied silent films and composed radio jingles to support her two daughters. It was during this time that Price began to receive wider acclaim for her compositions for orchestra and piano.

After her death, Price’s works were mainly forgotten, until boxes of her compositions were found abandoned in the attic of her former home in Chicago. This led to her music being reevaluated and performed. Price is praised for blending African American musical traditions—such as spirituals and dance rhythms—with European symphonic forms, creating a uniquely American sound. Many new recordings have been made – look for the Catalyst Quartet’s “*Uncovered*” series to hear her gorgeous, harmonically rich music.